

June 14, 2002

Chairman Billy Tauzin:
Chairman William M. Thomas:

As organizations that represent patients whose healthcare needs include access to prescription medicines, we thank you for your continued commitment to all Medicare beneficiaries. The Medicare legislation introduced by your committees represents a means to satisfy our three most significant goals: insurance for catastrophic circumstances, a voluntary prescription drug benefit available to all Medicare beneficiaries, and real choice for patients.

We believe any new Medicare prescription drug coverage must adequately ensure for high, often unanticipated prescription drug costs. Without such protection, patients with severely debilitating illness, chronic illness or serious unexpected illness will face not only the devastation of an illness, but also the prospect of financial disaster. One promise of the Medicare program was that America's seniors and those with disabilities would be protected from impoverishing themselves to obtain health care. This legislation has succeeded in that goal.

Second, new Medicare prescription drug coverage must be voluntary. All Medicare beneficiaries need coverage. For many Medicare beneficiaries, though, it is important that they not be shifted from current coverage with which they are satisfied. On average, the average savings for a Medicare beneficiary will be 30%.

Finally, Medicare beneficiaries, like all patients, want and need choice. They need the ability to examine insurance plans and choose the one which best suits their needs. Patients need the ability to work with doctors in determining which treatments are best for them. We fear that reliance on a single, government-run insurance plan would also mean a single, government-determined list of acceptable treatments. We applaud you for your vision in recognizing that a "one size fits all" plan would be detrimental to America's Medicare population.

We, in conjunction with many other organizations including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Neurology and the American Association of Health Plans, support this legislation because it satisfies the criteria we believe are essential to high-quality Medicare coverage.

American Osteopathic Association
Endocrinology Associates
The ALS Association
Kidney Cancer Association
Center for Patient Advocacy
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
Iowa Biotechnology Association
United Seniors Association
60 Plus Association
National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease
National Spinal Cord Injury Association
Pennsylvania Women's Health Alliance
Pennsylvania Healthcare Technology Network
American Parkinsons Association of Vermont
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Pennsylvania
Florida AIDS Action
Pennsylvania Hepatitis C Coalition
Epilepsy Foundation of Mississippi
International Patient Advocacy Association
Pennsylvania Partnership for Quality Healthcare